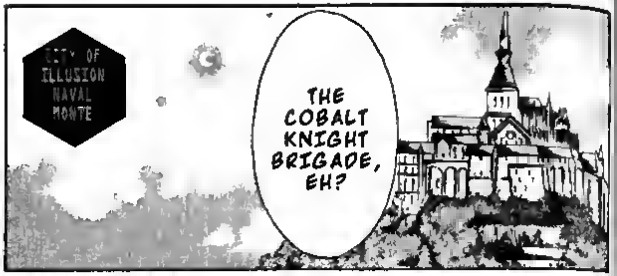
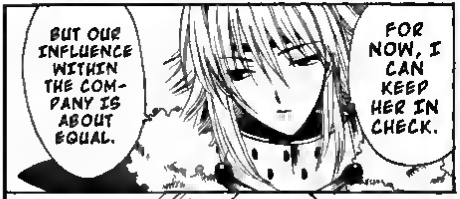
KAMUI.
WELL, WELL. IF IT ISN'T BALMUNG'S LITTLE ADD-ON
STILL INTO BAYSS-WORSHIPPING, I SEE
WE ARE THE ONES THAT HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO MONITOR SHUGO AND HIS PARTY.
BASE TRY NOT TO TRESTEP YOUR THORITY
I KNOW THAT.
WHA--
COME ON, KID.
I'M JUST HAVING A BIT OF FUN.
AFTER ALL, I DID LEARN IT FROM YOUR BALMUNG.
BUT DON'T WORRY. I WON'T LAY A HAND ON THEM.
YES...
JUST BECAUSE WE WORK FOR THE CC CORPORATION, DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T PLAY THE GAME EVERY NOW AND THEN

NEW GENERATION ONLINE
THE WORLD

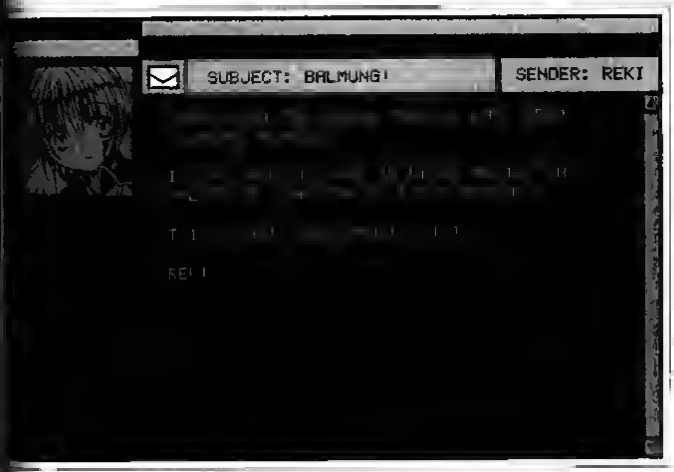
...AT LEAST, NOT YET...
MEAN-WHILE, ELSE-WHERE IN TOWN...
. OUKA WAS HAVING A BIT OF A ROUGH TIME
CAN I PET YOU TOO?
KAWAII!!!
A WERE-WOLF?
HOW RARE!
SO SOFT AND FLUFFY


CITY OF ILLUSION NAVAL MONTE
THE COBALT KNIGHT BRIGADE, EH?


BUT OUR INFLUENCE WITHIN THE COMPANY IS ABOUT EQUAL.
FOR NOW, I CAN KEEP HER IN CHECK.

IT SEEMS THE DESCENDANT OF FIANNA HAS GROWN UP AT LAST.
LISTEN TO YOU, SPEAKING LIKE A RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE CC CORPERATION

THEIR LEADER KAMUI HAS HER SIGHTS SET ON SHUGO
SHUGO
...OR THE VAGRANT AI GIRL WITH HIM...?


SUBJECT: BALMUNG!
SENDER: REKI

THEY DON'T HANDLE USER SUPPORT OR EVENT MANAGEMENT LIKE YOU GAME MASTERS, BUT THEY'RE SYS-ADMINS JUST THE SAME
THEY REPAIR DEFECTS IN THE PROGRAM AND WORK TO PREVENT CHEATING WITH THEIR DEBUGGING SKILLS
THE COBALT KNIGHT BRIGADE IS THE NAME OF CC CORP.'S DEBUG TEAM.
HMM BUT YOU DON'T KNOW KAMUI LIKE I DO SHE'D SCREW OVER ANOTHER ADMINIS-TRATOR IN A SECOND TO GET WHAT SHE WANTS
I DON'T SEE WHY THEY'D TRY ANYTHING RASH NOW
OH— THAT HURTS!
DIRECT HIT!
HA HA HA!
REMINDS ME OF A YOUNG BLADE-MASTER I USED TO KNOW...
...IS THAT SHE REPORTS DIRECTLY TO CC CORP.'S TOP BRASS!
AHEM!
THE PROBLEM

LOGIN 10
THE PLAYERS ARE THINKING

HUUUH? NEVER HEARD OF THAT.
NO IDEA, KID.
HMMM. I GUESS VAGRANT AIS ARE PRETTY RARE, HUH...?
NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW ANY-THING ABOUT 'EM.
OH OKAY, THEN THANKS ANYWAY!
HANG IN THERE!
SORRY WE COULDN'T HELP!
SO THIS IS THE PARENT-FINDING SUB-QUEST, EH?
HEY... WHAT'S WITH THE LONG FACE, HUH?
RUB
.....

THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN'T DO WHEN YOU WORK ON THE INSIDE.
ME?
WHICH MEANS THAT I NEED YOUR HELP.
A SYS-ADMIN IS ASKING A MEASLY PLAYER FOR HELP?
...YOU'RE TELLING ME THIS?
HA HA HA
YOU SURE HAVE GROWN UP, BALMUNG
SO...
YOU'RE SURE YOU DON'T KNOW ANY-THING ABOUT IT?
HAVE YOU HEARD ANY-THING... ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT VAGRANT AIS?

..ZEFIE WAS BORN INTO THIS PLACE...
...SIMPLY TO GET LOST.
.....
.....
LET'S GO, ZEFIE!
THEY MUST'VE FOUND SOMETHING OUT...
I GOT A MESSAGE IT'S FROM RENA AND THEM
Ping!
DESPICABLE
SIMPLY DESPICABLE!!

HEY ZEFIE, HOW OLD ARE YOU?
...
WAIT A SEC...
I KNOW THIS IS JUST A GAME, BUT I FEEL SO SORRY FOR THE GIRL.
SHE'S SO YOUNG...
BUT ACCORDING TO MY INTERNAL CHRONOMETER, THE UNIQUE DATA FILE THAT MAKES UP MY ARCHITECTURE WAS UPDATED THREE DAYS AGO...
.....
I DON'T KNOW.
TALK ABOUT A WEIRD MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATION-SHIP.
IT'S ALMOST AS IF...
...IS THAT AURA IS MY MOM.
THAT'S ALL.
ALL I KNOW IS THE ONLY DATA THAT WAS 'SET UP' INSIDE ME
SO THAT MEANS... YOU WERE JUST BORN...?
LEAVE IT TO AN AI TO USE ALL THOSE BIG WORDS.

SO THE CLUES ARE "FOUR YEARS AGO"...
..AND "NET SLUMS."
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO THESE "NET SLUMS," MIREILLE?
'COURSE NOT! I JUST FOUND OUT THE NAME!
IT'S SUPPOSEDLY A HANGOUT FOR HACKERS AND CHEATERS AND THE LIKE
CHEATERS?
OH! CHEETAH!
NOT QUITE, GUYS. NICE TRY, THOUGH.
AND GIVE THEMSELVES TONS OF MONEY AND SUPER-STRONG WEAPONS
CHEATERS ARE PLAYERS WHO MESS AROUND WITH THE PROGRAM TO MODIFY THEIR CHARACTERS
CAN'T STAND 'EM.
CHEATING CAN NEVER MAKE YOU TRULY STRONG!

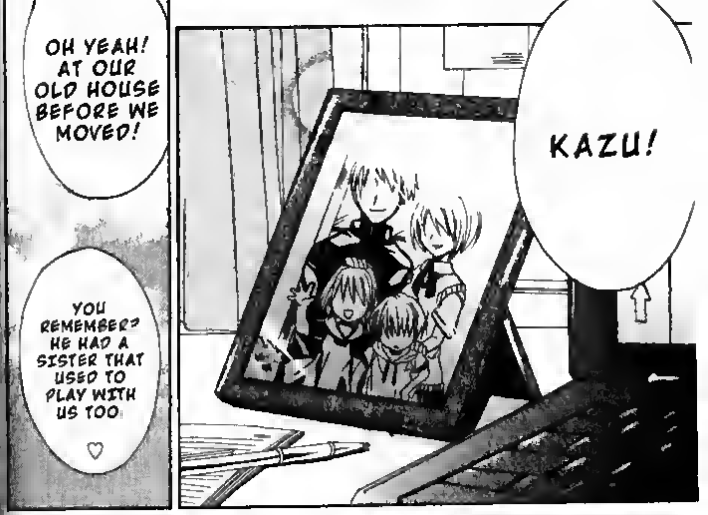
SHUGO KUNISAKI, YOU LITTLE --!!
TURNING HIS LOBSTY KOMIYAN 3RD, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CHARACTER MODEL IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD, INTO A FISH!
FISH!
I'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT YOU DID TO ME AT THE TANABATA EVENT.
KOMI-YAN-CAM
GIRLS! AGAIN WITH THE GIRLS!
WHY DOES HE ALWAYS GET TO HAVE GIRLS AS TEAM-MATES?!
AND THEN RENA WILL BE MINE, ALL MINE!!
HA HA
HA HA
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!!
JUST YOU WATCH! I SHALL GIVE YOU THE MOST HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN!!

D'OH!
WE FINALLY GET SOME INFO AND WE CAN'T DO ANY-THING ABOUT IT!
!!
YOU'RE RIGHT
Gah!
BUT I DO HAVE ANOTHER LEAD!!
THERE'S THE "FOUR YEARS AGO" CLUE WE CAN INVESTIGATE TO FIND THE CHARACTER THAT LOOKS LIKE ZEFIS!
.....
.....
TRUE STRENGTH ONLY COMES WITH TIME... THROUGH PERSISTENT TRAINING!!
I AGREE WITH YOU ON THAT, BUT...
A TRUE RAISE HUNTER, EH
YOU CAN'T CHANT AND STILL BE
BUT HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GET THERE?
AND HACKING-- WE COULD NEVER DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT!
WE CAN'T USE THE CHAOS GATE
VAGRANT ASS AND THE NET SLUMS
DOESN'T SOUND TOO FAR-FETCHED.
☆
OOOH!
AL-RIGHTY!
ON THE OTHER HAND, WHADDAYA SAY WE CALL IT A DAY?
☆
YAWN
HMPH
OH, MY!
LOOK AT THE TIME! YOU BETTER HIT THE SACK PRETTY SOON, MIREILLE
PAST YOUR BED TIME
YOU'RE RIGHT!
WE BETTER GET TO BED
I SHALL LOG OUT TOO, THEN.
SEE YA LATER!
OKAY, SEE YOU TOMOR-ROW!
ALL RIGHT!
SEE YA TOMORROW!
OKAY! SEE YOU AGAIN AT THE HIDE-OUT!
FOUR YEARS AGO, HUH...
.....
SPEAKING OF, SHUGO, DO YOU REMEMBER THAT TIME WHEN WE WERE STILL IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
?
REMEM-BER? HE LIVED IN OUR NEIGH-BOR-HOOD--

I TOTALLY FORGOT HOW LATE IT IS
AH! OH NO!
THIS WOULD BE A PERFECT CHANCE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM AGAIN!
RIGHT! RIGHT!
I WONDER HOW HE'S BEEN
OH, YEAH..
I SERIOUSLY NEED TO HIT THE HAY
NNNNN

STARE
ZEFIE...

onii-chan?
Uh!
ARE YOU LEAVING ME?
HMMM.. I DON'T KNOW.
THAT'S RIGHT. YOU'RE AN NPC, AREN'T YOU, ZEFIE
YOU THINK IT'D BE OKAY TO JUST LEAVE A VAGRANT AI ALONE?


OH YEAH! AT OUR OLD HOUSE BEFORE WE MOVED!
YOU REMEMBER? HE HAD A SISTER THAT USED TO PLAY WITH US TOO.
KAZU!

IT WAS THE WORLD!
YUP!
THAT GAME HE WAS ALWAYS PLAYING-- IT WASN'T, WAS IT?
WAIT A MINUTE!

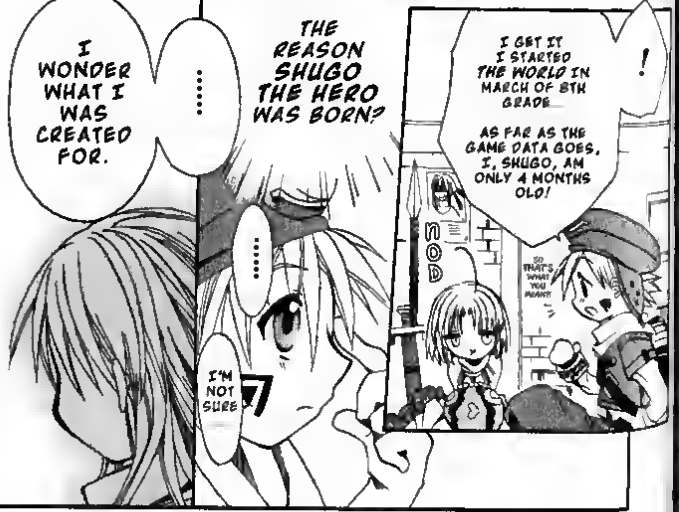
AH! I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT THAT!
THAT HE COLLAPSED WHILE PLAYING AND HAD TO BE HOSPITALIZED?
WAS IT AROUND THAT TIME...
WHAT HAP-PENED FOUR YEARS AGO?
I WONDER IF KAZU WOULD KNOW ANY-THING ABOUT
...WAS BECAUSE HE WAS DOING IT, TOO.
THE REASON I STARTED PLAY-ING...

NAVAL MONTE, CITY OF ILLUSION
FOUR YEARS AGO...
WE SURE FOUND OUT A LOT OF STUFF TODAY, HUH?
...AI... NET SLUMS ...
GOOD THING WE CAME HERE, EH?
UNH!
UNH!
MM..
SHALL WE GO, ZEFIG?
..THESE ARE LITTLE STEPS, BUT AT LEAST WE'RE MOVING FORWARD.
I'M SURE WE USED OUR COIN RIGHT.
YEAH.
AND... THANKS.
WELL, SO LONG, NAVAL MONTE.
CITY OF WATER MAC ANU

HMPH
OH WELL.. IT IS SUMMER VACATION AND ALL.
FINE, STAY WITH HER AS LONG AS YOU WANT
I CAN'T LEAVE HER...
ANOTHER LITTLE SISTER
SHUGO, YE-YES YOU CAN!!
GRR!!
HE-HEY, RENA!
..CARING BIG BROTHER SHUGO!
GOOO-BYE..
OH, WELL.
FOR NOW, WHY DON'T WE HEAD TO THE HIDE-OUT.?
STOP
COME OOOOON
YOU REALLY LEAVING?

HUFF. HUFF. HUFF
I- IN OTHER WORDS, THERE'S A STORK AND HE
LEMME SEE YOUR HAND.
GAH!
WHY- WHY-
WAAAH
EEP!
BLAH-BLABBER BLAH!
GOT TOG-ETHER, SEE, AND THEY, LIKE
WE- WELL, YOU SEE, MY MOM AND MY DAD

...FOUR MONTHS AGO...?
SHUGO WAS BORN...


I WONDER WHAT I WAS CREATED FOR.
.....
THE REASON SHUGO THE HERO WAS BORN?
.....
I'M NOT SURE
I GET IT I STARTED THE WORLD IN MARCH OF 8TH GRADE...
AS FAR AS THE GAME DATA GOES, I, SHUGO, AM ONLY 4 MONTHS OLD!
!
nod
SO THAT'S WHAT YOU MEANT

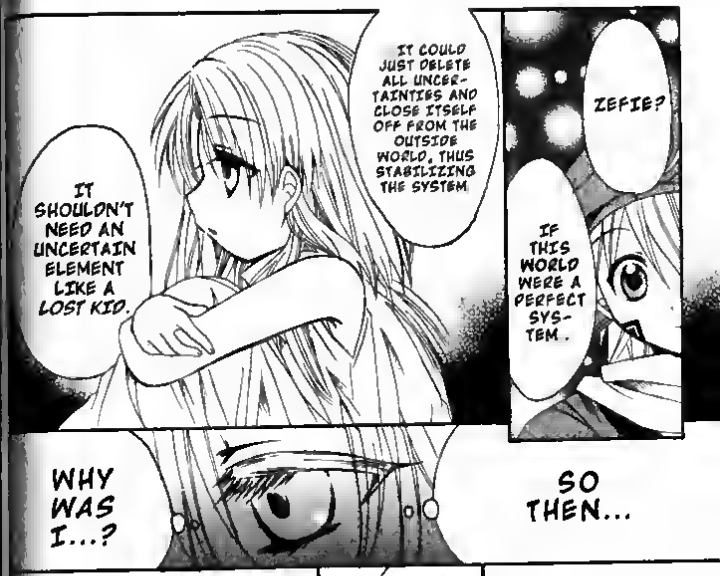
YAAAWN

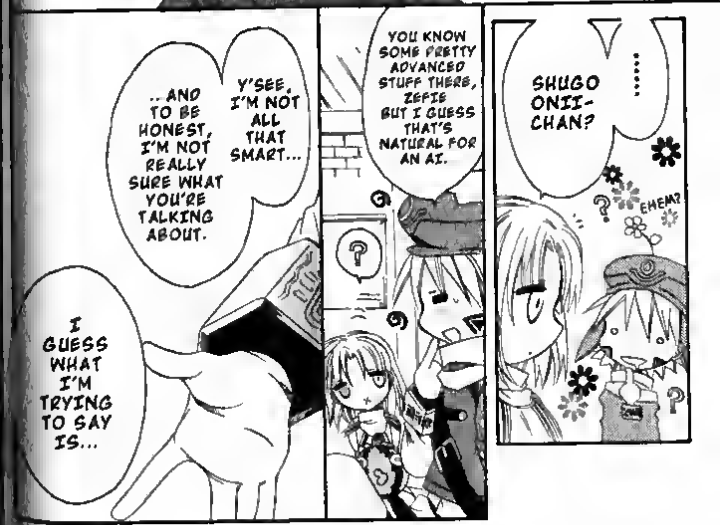
I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID...
HMM?
SOME-THING WRONG, ZERO?

SHUGO?
BOY, AM I TIRED. AS I SHOULD BE...

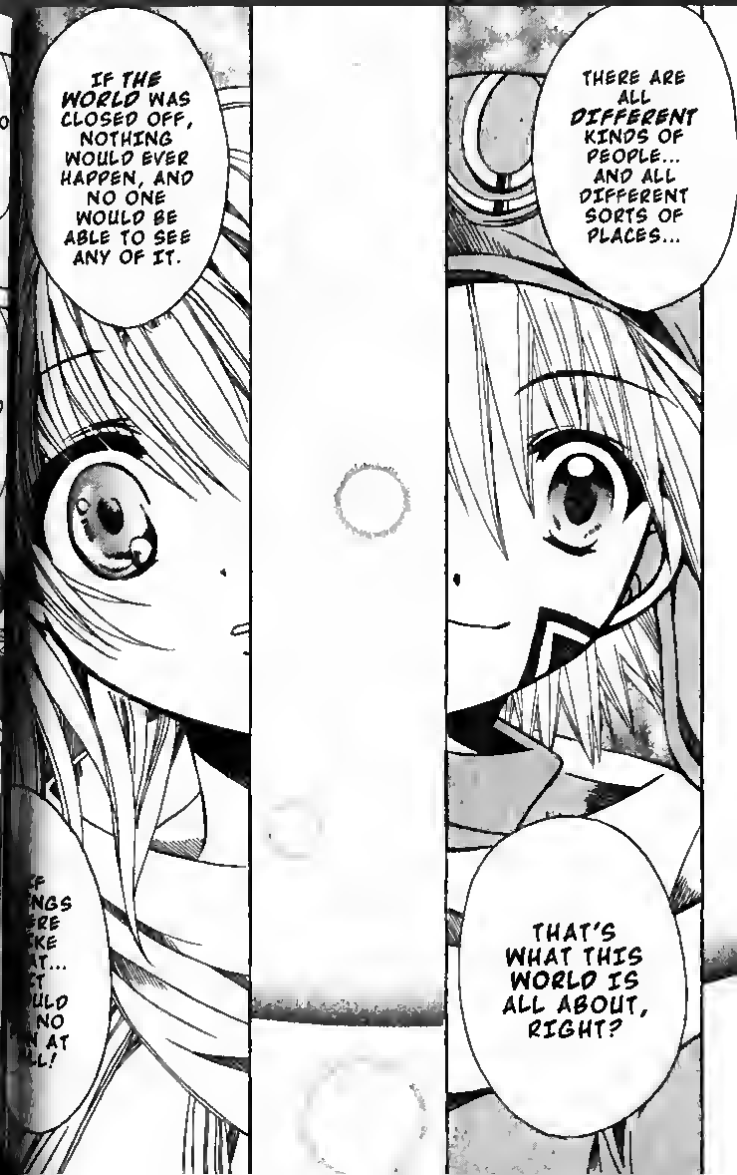
THE REASON I WAS BORN.
ME?
...WHY WERE YOU BORN?
.....
SHUGO...
OH, OKAY.

...IT WOULDN'T BE ANY FUN, RIGHT?
...IF IT WAS LIKE THAT...


IT SHOULDN'T NEED AN UNCERTAIN ELEMENT LIKE A LOST KID.
IT COULD JUST DELETE ALL UNCERTAINTIES AND CLOSE ITSELF OFF FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD, THUS STABILIZING THE SYSTEM.
ZEFIE?
IF THIS WORLD WERE A PERFECT SYSTEM.
WHY WAS I...?
SO THEN...


I GUESS WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS...
..AND TO BE HONEST, I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
Y'SEE, I'M NOT ALL THAT SMART...
YOU KNOW SOME PRETTY ADVANCED STUFF THERE, ZEFIE BUT I GUESS THAT'S NATURAL FOR AN AI.
SHUGO ONII-CHAN?
.....
EHEM?

DON'T YOU THINK SO, ZEFIE?
RIGHT?
SHUGO...
WAHAHA-HA-HAHA
I GUESS I'M GETTING PRETTY HOOKED ON THIS GAME, HUH?
SILLY ME
.....
AS RENA WOULD SAY...
"THIS IS THE WORLD, THAT'S WHY!"
☆
NO!


IF THE WORLD WAS CLOSED OFF, NOTHING WOULD EVER HAPPEN, AND NO ONE WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE ANY OF IT.
THERE ARE ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE... AND ALL DIFFERENT SORTS OF PLACES...
THAT'S WHAT THIS WORLD IS ALL ABOUT, RIGHT?

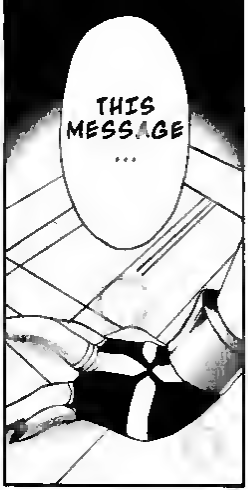
KAMUI-SAN.
JUST DON'T-WORK YOURSELF SO HARD YOU GET SICK.
BUT MORE PLAYERS LOG IN AT NIGHT THIS IS WHEN THE REAL WORK BEGINS!!
I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE OF THIS
ANY INTERESTING CASES?
HERE ARE THE BUG REPORT EMAILS FROM THE PLAYERS FOR TODAY
TSK!
NOTHING MAJOR TO REPORT
AND JUST WHEN YOU LET DOWN YOUR GUARD, TROUBLE ROARS ITS UGLY HEAD.
THE OPENING OF THE NEW ROOT TOWN IS GOING VERY WELL
NO
!
WHERE ARE TODAY'S FILES?!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ME!! JUST DO YOUR JOB!
YE-YES!

"A JAPANESE WORD GAME IN WHICH PLAYERS MUST COME UP WITH WORDS STARTING WITH THE SAME SYLLABLE THAT THE LAST WORD ENDED WITH

YES
I APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION
Oh, hey!
That's great! So you read my email?
tap
tap
THIS IS A SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR
WE HAVE VERIFIED YOUR BUG SUBMISSION.
THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE SHARED WITH US IS OF EXTREMELY HIGH IMPORTANCE.
tap
tap
OF COURSE. THAT'S WHY..
Oooh!
I thought so!
It's really got me in a fix here! You've got to do something about it!

...AND GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS MATTER.
...I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU MORE IN PERSON..
xap
tap

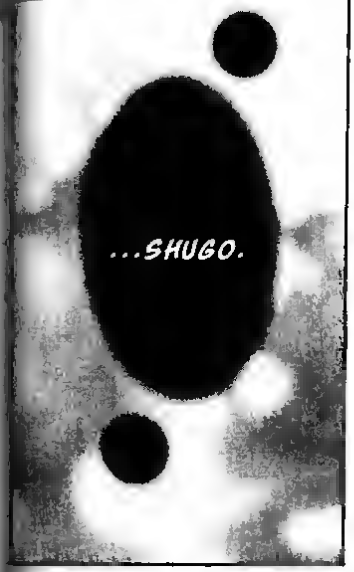
.....
...HMMM...
smirk.


THIS MESSAGE ...

CONFIRM THE LOCATION ON THE ONE WHO SENT THIS MESSAGE!
MA-MA'AM !!
MAGI !!

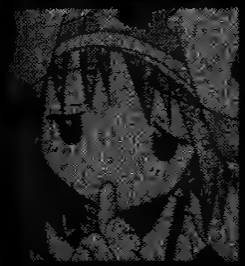
GO AHEAD
CONNECT ME FOR A CHAT
PERFECT!
CURRENTLY LOGGED IN
CONNECTING

ONE ONLINE VIDEO GAME
THE WORLD


...SHUGO.

MAN-TOH-IHI!
YOU-IS-SOU!
GAH!
HE-HEIS-TATSU!
SOMEBODY HELP ME!

YES, I SEE.
SO THIS TROUBLE-MAKER'S NAME IS



SUBJECT: GOOD WORK TODAY

SENDER: MIREILLE

LOGIN IT
4 YEARS
AGO
SUBJECT: GOOD WORK TODAY
SENDER: MIREILLE

...ABOUT THE SIGHTING OF THAT ZEFIE LOOK-ALIKE CHARACTER FOUR YEARS AGO..
SO...
DID YOU FIND SOMETHING OUT?
CITY OF WATER MAC ANU
ZZZ
WHEN I GOT TO THE HIDEOUT, SHUGO WAS CONKED OUT ON THE FLOOR
SO HE WAS UP ALL NIGHT WITH ZEFIE
SHUGO JUST CAN'T STAND TO LOSE AT ANYTHING ...
HEY!
SHUGO !!
SNAP
HUH?

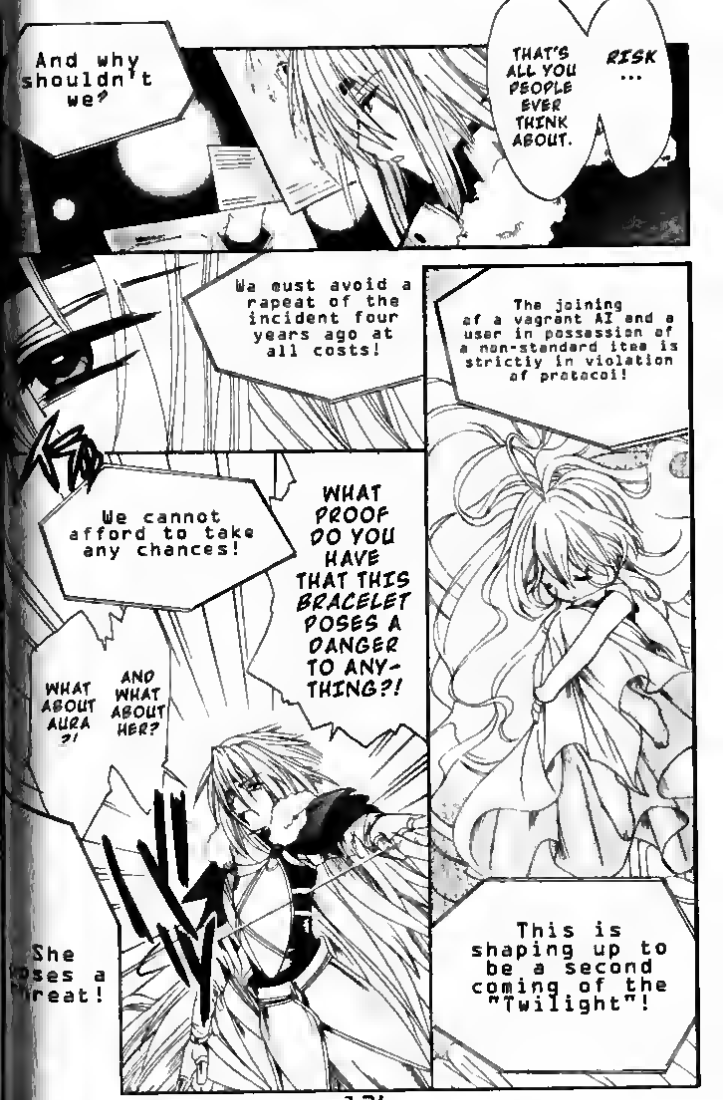
HOH
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO BEAT AN AS LOADED WITH A LANGUAGE DICTIONARY AT A WORD GAME, HUH?
.....
HUH?!
IT'S MY MOMMY!
gasp!
NO WAY
WAIT
ZEFIE?!
ぼう……

SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH.
SC-
JUST WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, DIVING IN THE RIVER ALL OF A SUDDEN, ZEFIE?
sigh...
huff
huff
I SAW MY MOM HERE.
.....
*HANSHIN TIGERS- THE OSAKA BASED PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL TEAM. AFTER THEY WON THE 85 SERIES, FANS JUMPED INTO THE NEARBY RIVER.
WHAT HAPPENED?
WAY TO GO, THERE
SOMEONE JUMPED IN?
Hoo
Wee!
OOOOOH!
HUH?
IT'S JUST LIKE THE CHILDREN'S STORY ABOUT THE DOG WITH THE STEAK IN ITS MOUTH
NYAHA!
KINDA HARD TO TELL IF ZEFIE'S REALLY SMART OR DUMB, ISN'T IT?
TEE HEE HEE
GRR
ACK!
sploosh
sploosh
sploosh
OH! IT SEES ITSELF IN THE WATER I GET IT
YOUR MOM? AURA?
SHE WAS IN THE WATER
NOD
I GET IT, I GET IT!
OH!
shimmer
ZEFIE LOOKS LIKE HER MOTHER, RIGHT?
SHOCK!
WHAT? SERIOUSLY?

EXPERIENCE EXPERIENCE
DON'T WORRY. JUST DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN.
I THINK IT'S CUTE! SHE WAS JUST BORN, SO SHE NEEDS TO BUILD UP LEARNING EXPERIENCES, RIGHT?
huff huff
ZZZ+!
BUT I DID FIND OUT ONE THING FOR CERTAIN
HUH?
OH, YEAH.
I TRIED SEARCHING THE MAIN NEWSPAPERS, BUT
..EVERYTHING I FOUND JUST SEEMED A LITTLE FISHY

EC CORPORATION ONLINE MANAGEMENT CENTER
Recent events are most alerming. Most greve.
You are aware of why you were summoned, Haibung?
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW IS IN THE REPORT I SUBMITTED TO YOU
IF THIS IS ABOUT SHUGO AND THE VAGRANT AI
Your negligence of your duties is inexcuseble!
This is no more than a child's summer vacation diary!
...You mean this piece of rubbish before me?
You were ordered to give a report on AURA...
...And the risk she poses...
...through her irreguler contact with users.

She is a threat to the interests of CC Corporation.
.....
We are most disappointed in you.
——.....
We have ignored your little gaaas out of raspect for tha "Azure Sky," but no eore.
!!
.....


And why shouldn't we?
THAT'S ALL YOU PEOPLE EVER THINK ABOUT.
RISK ...
We must avoid a repeat of the incident four years ago at all costs!
The joining of a vagrant AI and a user in possession of a non-standard item is strictly in violation of protocol!
We cannot afford to take any chances!
WHAT PROOF DO YOU HAVE THAT THIS BRACELET POSES A DANGER TO ANY-THING?!
WHAT ABOUT AURA ?!
AND WHAT ABOUT HER?
She poses a threat!
This is shaping up to be a second coming of the "Twilight"!

MAJOR DISASTERS IN YOKOHAMA DUE TO INTERNET FAILURES
MULTIPLE USERS OF THE WORLD LOST CONSCIOUSNESS AND WERE HOSPITALIZED

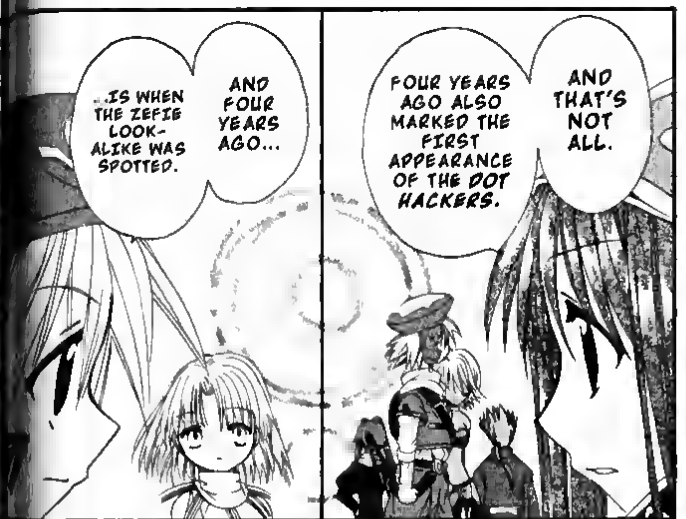
IT WAS ALL 4 YEARS AGO.

THAT'S ALL JUST URBAN LEGEND, ISN'T IT?
YOU'RE KIDDING!
EH?
AND A REAL CITY?
REAL PEOPLE?
BOGUS
SOUNDS
WAIT
AN ONLINE GAME WAS THE CAUSE OF ALL THAT?
YOU GET INVINCIBLE MONSTERS, AREAS YOU CAN'T GET TO THROUGH THE GATES THE LIST GOES ON AND ON
CHECKING ON DIFFERENT MESSAGE BOARDS FOR BUGS...
THERE'S TOO MANY COINCIDENCES FOR THIS TO BE ALL JUST A MADE-UP STORY
NOPE

Balmung...
..you are unfit to be a an administrator for CC Corp.
OH SALLY?
I'M STILL A BEGINNER.
I WASN'T EVEN INTO GAMES AT THE TIME
FOUR YEARS AGO THAT PUTS US IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DO YOU REMEMBER THE INCIDENT IN YOKOHAMA?
THAT WAS THE YEAR BEFORE I STARTED PLAYING THIS GAME.
ALL THE RUMORS ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO
ARE VERY SERIOUS.

...SOMETHING EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO THIS WORLD.
...COULD BE ZEFIE AND THIS BRACELET.
...THE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THIS MYSTERY--
IN OTHER WORDS

DON'T JUST STAND THERE!
KAUZ
THAT IS DANGEROUS!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I THOUGHT YOU LEARNED YOUR LESSON!
ZEFIE!
SHE'S GONE!
ZEFIE!
AAAAAH
AH!


AND FOUR YEARS AGO...
...IS WHEN THE ZEFIE LOOK-ALIKE WAS SPOTTED.
AND THAT'S NOT ALL.
FOUR YEARS AGO ALSO MARKED THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE DOT HACKERS.

I ALWAYS ASSUMED
THE FINAL MYSTERY THAT THE DOT HACKERS BEAT...
SO EVERYTHING STARTED FOUR YEARS AGO...
.....
WHAT?
SOMETHING ELSE?
MUNCH MUNCH
BUT MAYBE JUST MAYBE...
IT INVOLVES SOMETHING ELSE-- SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

MEANWHILE, I GET STUCK WITH ALL THE WORK
ALWAYS GOOFING AROUND
SCOOT!
IF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT BALMUNG, HE WON'T BE COMING.
I KNOW HE LIKES TO TAKE HIS TIME, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS
HOW LONGS HE GOTTA KEEP ME WAITIN'? WE HAVE WORK TO DO!
THE SHUGO CASE HAS BEEN REASSIGNED TO MY MASTER KAMUI AND THE COBALT KNIGHT BRIGADE WILL HANDLE IT NOW
WHAT?!
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
SAI--MAGI!!
I'M SORRY, REKI
I HAVE TO ASK YOU TO HAND OVER ALL OF THE DATA RECORDS YOU ARE HANDLING

BOK
GOH!
BONK
BOOH!
BOK
Grunt!
I'M NOT STUPID.
Splash!
SHUDDER SHUDDER
WHAT ARE YOU THINK-ING?!

HOLD ON A SEC.
WHAT DID YOU MEAN JUST NOW?
ABOUT BALMUNG NOT COMING?
BALMUNG IS BEEN STRIPPED OF HIS SYSTEM ADMINISTRATIVE PRIVILEGES
WHY? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU GUYS DO?!
NOTHING.
IT'S COMPANY ORDERS
I'LL TAKE THAT DATA.
AS THEY SAY UP ABOVE...
IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL IT...
...LETE IT.
WHETHER IT BE USER...
...OR NPC.
OR EVEN ADMINISTRATOR, IF NEED BE.

SO TODAY WE'RE READY FOR ANOTHER GREAT DAY OF FUN AND ADVENTURE!
WE'VE GATHERED ALL THE INFORMATION WE NEED!
ALL RIGHT!
MIRE-ILLE'S HIDEOUT
LET'S GO GET 'EM!
GO!
GO!

GLARE
UGH...
OOOOOOH
YEAAAAAH
.....
.....

WHO'S MOES IMPORTANT TO YOU, ME, OR ZEFIE?
.....
SHUGO!

DON'T BE SO UPSET ZEFIE'S ALWAYS GOOFING AROUND, RIGHT?
.....
MIRE-ILLE! ZEFIE!
SING A HARD HERE!
D'OH!
YUP
IT'S THE BIG, BRAVE HERO'S JOB TO KEEP THE PARTY MOTIVATED
NYAHAAAA!

SURE, THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES WHEN I'VE THOUGHT TO MYSELF...
DAM-MIT
.....
BUT HE ALWAYS PUT THE GAMERS AND THE WORLD FIRST, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE
THINGS WOULD BE A LOT EASIER WITHOUT HIM AROUND

BOW
HOPE-FULLY THEY'LL LET YOU OFF WITH JUST A PAY CUT, EEKS
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME

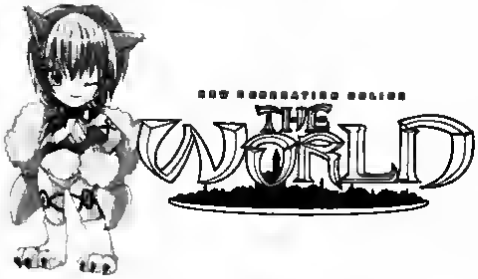
BALMUNG...
...I'M NOT GOING TO LET IT END LIKE THIS!

AMORE!
GAH!
THIS IS MY HIDE-OUT!
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
WH-
WHO ARE YOU?!
WHAT'RE YOU SO ABOUT MY HOUSE, HUH?
KOMIYAN THE TURD! LONELY PRINCE OF GRUNTY POOP!
WELL, YOU SEE...
HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE?!
UNLESS WE'VE TRADED MEMBER ADDRESSES!
YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO GET IN HERE
IT'S KOMIYAN, THE THIRD PRINCE OF IMPERIA, YADDA YADA YADA, HIS MAJESTY! REMEMBER?!
HOW DARE YOU MESS UP MY NAME!
WRONG!
OH WHAT A COME-BACK
DOES THIS GUY EVER SHUT UP?
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE!!
UH HUH UH-HUH!
YES, THAT'S RIGHT IN CLASS, I'M ALWAYS THE ODD MAN OUT. LONELY AS CAN BE

ZEPIE,
ZEPIE,
ZEPIE!!
ALL I EVER HEAR FROM YOU IS ..
HUH?
I'M NOT JEAL-OUS!
YOU MORON!
GET-TING ALL JEAL-OUS OVER AN AI!!
YES, YOU ARE.
HMPH
COULDA FOOLED ME.
AAAARGH!
YES, YOU ARE.
YES, YOU ARE.
KUNISAKI! HOW DARE YOU MAKE POOR RENA CRY!

...SO YOU'D BETTER OBEY OUR ORDERS
...WE ARE SYSTEM ADMIN-ISTRA-TORS.
UGH
IF YOU DON'T, WE WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO USE FORCE
クス.
OUKA!!
INVESTIGATE?
WE ARE HERE TO INVESTI-GATE A REPORT FROM ANOTHER USER
!!
YES.
shing!

WE OPENED THE DOOR FOR HIM.
PUT YOUR CONTROLLERS DOWN, NOW!
DON'T MOVE!
WH-WHAT?!
JUST WHO THE HELL ARE YOU CREEPS?! TALK ABOUT RUDE!!
!!


THE WORLD

SHUGO.
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE USER AGREEMENT...
...YOUR CHARACTER MODEL WILL BE SEIZED UNDER SUSPICION OF MALICIOUS CHEATING.
!!

SUBJECT: FOUL PLAY

SENDER: KAMIYAN III

Dear [illegible] User Support Director, CC Corp.

First of all, I am one of the biggest fans of The World.
Please listen.
My [illegible] has been [illegible] ruined by
another user.
If you take a look at the attached screen shot, you will see
what I mean.

The user that did that to me is named Shugo. I just know he's
been cheating.
He also has a metal bracelet that's not listed in the
strategy guide. He shouldn't be allowed to get away with
this. Please shut down this criminal's account at once!

LOGIN 12
CHEATING

SUBJECT: FOUL PLAY
SENDER: KAMIYAH III

TAKE A GOOD LOOK!!
どっぎゃーん!!
KA-BAM!
Gross!
.....
.....
WHAT?
TSK!
NO, IT'S NOT!!
WHAT? COULD THIS BE? YOU'VE GOT A NEW CHARACTER CLAAAASS?
WAAAY COOOL!!
OOH AH!!
ドドドド
IT'S NOT FUNNY!
BwaHaHaHa!
Hee Hee
HEH.
OOG AAAH!

CHEATING?!
I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING!!
THIS HAS TO BE SOME KIND OF MISTAKE
THAT'S RIGHT!
WHY MY BROTHER...?
LISTEN TO YOU!!
YOU'RE PATHETIC, KUNISAKI!
...YOU'VE FORGOTTEN WHAT YOU DID TO MY FACE!!
DON'T TELL ME...
SHUGO.. YOU ARE SUSPECTED OF MALICIOUS CHEATING.

"CC CORP RESERVES THE RIGHT TO DELETE THE ACCOUNT OF ANY USER DEEMED GUILTY OF FRAUDULENT ACTS."
DIDN'T YOU READ YOUR USER AGREEMENT?
THEY'RE GOING TO ERASE SHUGO?
!
EH
IN OTHER WORDS HIS CHARACTER'S GOING TO BE DELETED
WITH NO ONE TO STAND IN MY WAY.. RENA WILL BE MINE AT LAST..!
HA!
HA!
Oh ha ha
THAT'S RIGHT, KUNISAKI!! AND MAY YOU BE PUT ON DISPLAY ON ALL THE MESSAGE BOARDS AS THE CRIMINAL YOU ARE!
Bwa Ha Ha Ha!
YAHOO!
I'M GOING TO DISAPPEAR?
SHUGO...
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE USER AGREEMENT, I AM SEIZING YOUR CHARACTER MODELS
ALONG WITH...

!!
IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THAT WEIRD BRACELET OF YOURS, KUNISAKI!
GAH!
SHUGO, YOU DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT, DO YOU?!
UM.. ER.. ABOUT THAT...
OH...
...COULD THAT HAVE BEEN BACK AT THE TANABATA EVENT?
I HOPE YOU GET THE MOST HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT THE WORLD CAN DIG UP!!
WAAH!
YOU--
YOU FIEND!
YOU HARDLY EVEN NOTICE IT!
IT'S CUTE EMBARRASSMENT
Grr
Grr
ISHMENT?

YEAH!
YOU'RE THE GARBAGE, LADY!
*GRUNT
ZEFIE !!
THAT NPC IS AN IRREGULARITY-- A BUG, GARBAGE DATA, NOTHING MORE
SO WE'LL BE COLLECTING HER
.....
ARE YOU ...
...GOING TO ERASE ME AGAIN?

OH?!
NO!
YOU KIDDING ME?!
WHAT?!
YES. THE REST OF YOU ARE BEING SEIZED FOR QUESTIONING.
WHA-?!
AND LAST OF ALL..
THE NPC OVER THERE !!

QUIET!!
I HIGHLY OBJECT TO WHAT YOU'RE DOING!!
YES!
YEAH!
わっ
……
WAIT!!
SO, MAYBE IT IS TRUE— BUT DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE BEING A TINY BIT HEAVY-HANDED?
WANT TO GET DELETED RIGHT HERE AND NOW?
OR DO YOU ALL...
キロ
WE HOPE YOU CONTINUE TO ENJOY YOUR TIME IN THE WORLD.
WE APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION, SIR KOMIYAN THE THIRD
DON'T MAKE ME GET UGLY.
speechless...
……

ADMIN-ISTRATOR, WAIT!
I ONLY REPORT-ED KUNI-SAKI.
HIS PARTY--RENA--HAS NOTH-ING TO DO WITH THIS!!
UH-NON-SENSE
WHAT ARE YOU TALK-ING ABOUT ...?
AND YOUR ASSIS-TANCE IS APPRE-CIATED NOW LEAVE THE REST TO US.
……
MOVE IT!!
YOU WILL NOT BE NOTIFIED REGARDING THE OUTCOME OF ALL OF THIS
OH, AND JUST SO YOU KNOW.
BUT ...!!
RENA

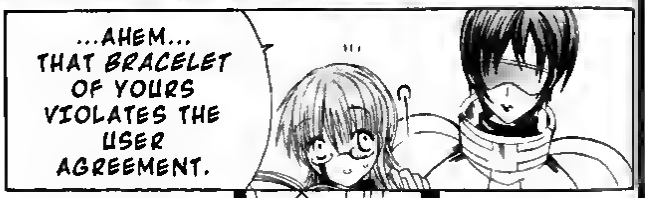
HMPH.
MAYBE MY CHARACTER'S...
...NOT OUT OF THE GAME QUITE YET
THAT STUBBORN FOOL HASN'T CHANGED A BIT...
-san.
Balmung-san.
Are you still alive?
FOUR YEARS AGO...
CC CORP TRIED TO DELETE ANOTHER HERO, "KITE", AND THE BRACELET HE POSSESSED
BUT THAT ONLY SERVED TO MAKE THE DAMAGE MUCH, MUCH WORSE.
...was among those rendered unconscious, right?
And one of your best friends...
YES.
I'M JUST WAITING TO BE DEALT WITH.
Where have you been? Geez!
IS THAT YOU, REKI?
I've been really worried about you, Sir!
CC CORP STILL HASN'T LEARNED A THING
"IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL IT, DELETE IT"--
THEY NEVER STOP TO THINK THAT THEIR ONLY TENET FOR PROTECTING THE WORLD COULD BE WRONG.

.....
SHE'S STILL ALIVE AND WELL TO THIS DAY.
THEY DON'T WANT TO ACCEPT IT.
BUT CC CORP DOESN'T EVEN WANT TO SEE IT.
So...
What do you plan on doing?
Balmung-san of the Azure Sky?
Balmung...
...ARE THE PLAYERS THAT LIVE IN IT THEM-SELVES.
THE ONLY ONES THAT CAN PROTECT THIS WORLD...
WHAT ELSE?

I...
...COULDN'T SAVE HIM.
AT THE TIME, I UNDERSTOOD NOTHING ABOUT THE SYSTEM THAT NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED.
DRAW YOUR SWORDS!!
JUST LIKE CC CORP, I ASSUMED THEY WERE JUST YOUR AVERAGE MEAN-SPIRITED CHEATERS AND I TRIED TO DELETE THEM
Grr
WAHAHA
BALMUNG OF THE AZURE SKY USED TO BE A PRETTY STUBBORN GUY, DIDN'T HE?
BUT I ACTUALLY SAW IT GUIDED BY KITE
...I SAW THE CORE OF THIS WORLD
AFTER THAT, I GAVE UP PLAYING TO BE AN ADMINIS-TRATOR
BECAUSE I LOVE THIS WORLD.

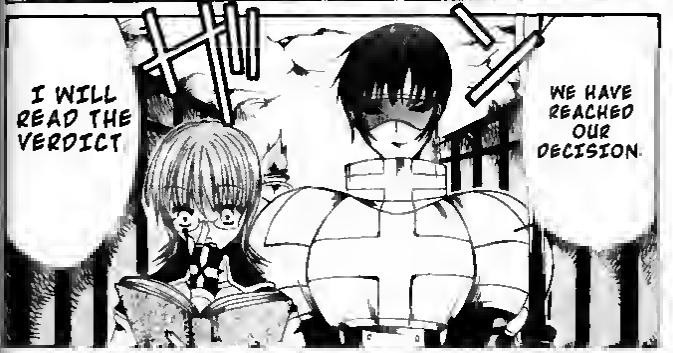
HOLDING CELLS OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE COBALT SKY
IT FEELS LIKE WE'VE BEEN HERE FOR AGES ALREADY.
HOW LONG DO THEY PLAN ON KEEPING US HERE?
!!
...
WHAT'S THE STORY WITH ALL THOSE KNIGHT-LOOKING GUYS?
AREN'T GAMES SUPPOSED TO BE FUN?!
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!
WHAT A LIVELY LITTLE BUNCH.
HAPH
HARD-HEADED COMPANY EXECS.
SYSTEM ADMINISTRATORS TROUBLE-SHOOTERS OF THE ONLINE WORLD.
I BET PROBABLY CC CORP PERSONNEL RUNNING THE WORLD.
I see. Very well. You have some growing up to do.
Behave yourself. You shall receive the final verdict at a later date.
You may go.
WHO'S THE BIGGER CHILD HERE?
We await your decision. Have you changed your mind?
YOU KNOW HOW STUBBORN I CAN BE.
YOU GUYS REALLY DON'T UNDERSTAND A THING...
DO YOU?
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ALL THIS...?
AURA?

SEE ?!
THAT IS TRUE.
WHILE THE LIMITED EDITION "DOT HACKERS" CHARACTER CONTEST WAS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC..
SO WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT NOW?
SHE'S RIGHT!! SO WHY NOW, ALL OF A SUDDEN?!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WE WON THESE CHARACTER MODELS AS PRIZES!!
.....


...AHEM... THAT BRACELET OF YOURS VIOLATES THE USER AGREEMENT.

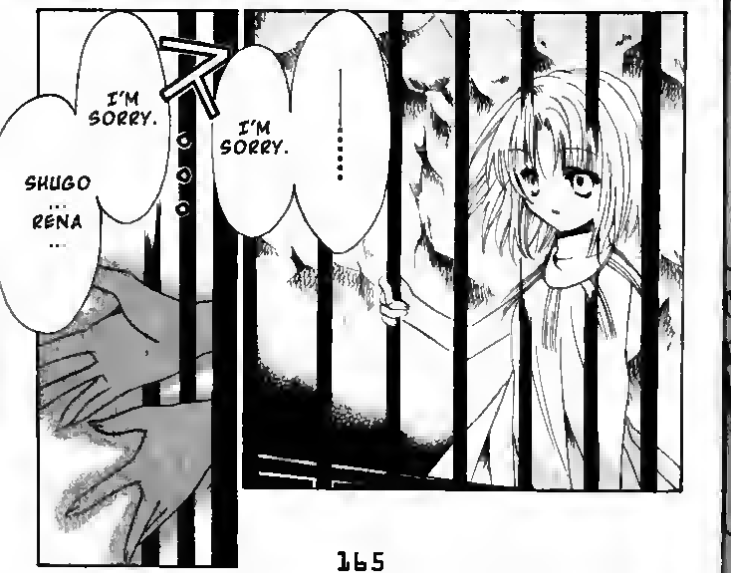
SHUGO IS NOT A BAD PER-SON!!
HEY!
THIS IS SO UNFAIR!
GAH!
YEAH! YOU'RE TREATING THEM JUST LIKE CRIMI-NALS!!
YOU THINK THEY'RE THE ONLY ONES IN TROU-BLE?
THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US EARL-IER?!
WHAT?!
IT'S AN UNAU-THO-RIZED ITEM.
COME ON-- I GOT THIS THING AS A SPECIAL ITEM IN A GAME SUB-EVENT!!

!!
MAYBE YOU SHOULD THINK ABOUT THE POSITION YOU'RE ALL IN.


I WILL READ THE VERDICT
WE HAVE REACHED OUR DECISION.

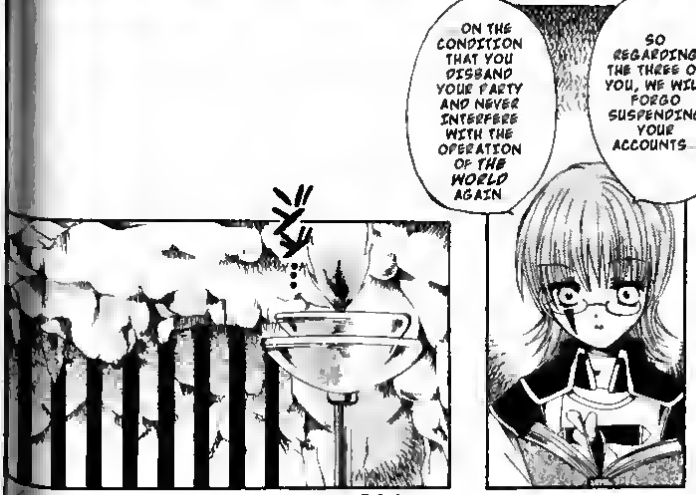
YOUR ACCOUNTS ARE HEREBY SUSPEND-ED.
AND USER RENA ...
USER SHUGO ...
EH?
!!

AH...
.....!
AND THAT GRUNTY YOU'VE BEEN RAISING SO LOVINGLY.
AND THOSE ITEMS YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO GET YOUR HANDS ON AGAIN.
G-G-GONE?
UGH...
EVEN THE CHARACTERS YOU SPENT HUNDREDS OF HOURS BUILDING UP
ACTUALLY, WE SHOULD BE DELETING YOUR CHARACTERS, TOO.
ALTHOUGH INDIRECTLY, YOU DID REAP BENEFITS FROM THE CHEATING
AS MEMBERS OF THE SAME PARTY, YOU ARE ALL ACCOMPLICES TO THIS CRIME.
EVERY-THING...


I'M SORRY.
SHUGO ... RENA ...
I'M SORRY.
.....

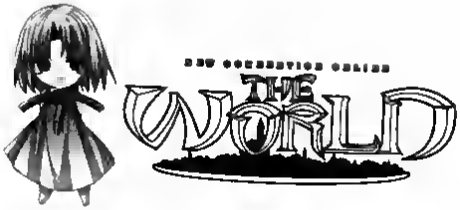
WAIT A SECOND! THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS!

AT CC CORP, WE BELIEVE "USER SATISFACTION IS JOB ONE"
OF COURSE WE WOULDN'T GO THAT FAR
OH, SHUGO ...
SHUGO ...


ON THE CONDITION THAT YOU DISBAND YOUR PARTY AND NEVER INTERFERE WITH THE OPERATION OF THE WORLD AGAIN
SO REGARDING THE THREE OF YOU, WE WILL FORGO SUSPENDING YOUR ACCOUNTS
.....

GRUNTY. AFTER SHUGO WENT TO ALL THE TROUBLE TO SAVE YOU..
GRUNT ?
—
I CAN'T DO ANY-THING FOR MY FRIENDS !!
WHY?
GONE
DELE-TED ?
BUT SHE'S SO CUTE
sob
sob
sob
I CANNOT DO IT ...!!
MS CC CORP. THERE, JUST GET MY FRIENDS OUT OF HERE, WILL YA?
THIS IS A RELIEF I'M GLAD I DIDN'T GET ALL YOU GUYS IN TOO BAD OF A FIX
IS THAT ALL? THIS IS GREAT !!
.....

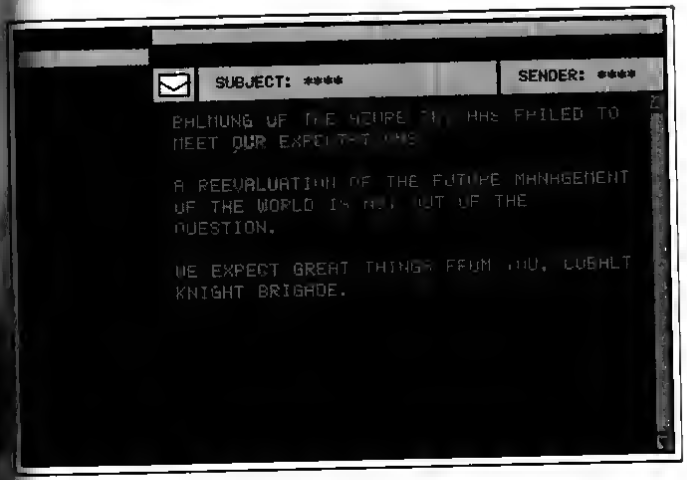
I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THIS CHARAC-TER
ALL THE RARE ITEMS I'VE COLLECTED. THE MEMBER ADDRESSES OF ALL THE FRIENDS I'VE MADE
I...I DON'T WANNA GET DELETED.
YOU JUST CAN'T ERASE ME FROM THE WORLD !!
THE GAME AND ITS MANAGE-MENT... IS THIS IS THIS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT ?!
I'M POWER-LESS I BUILT UP MY CHARACTER TO BE THE STRONGEST, ALL FOR NOTHING...
DARN IT!!
HUH!
TWI


THE WORLD

NO, REALLY. I'M JUST GLAD YOU GUYS ...
... AREN'T BEING ERASED.
USERS ARE OUR VALUED CUSTOMERS— WELL, BESIDES CHEATERS AND CRIMINALS, THAT IS
IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE DOING THIS TO BE MEAN
GOO GOO
OH SHUGO
SHUGO !!
BWA! SHUGO
NOW, THEN.
...MY DEAR CRIMI-NALS.
YOU THREE CAN WAIT THERE FOR YOUR PUNISH-MENT...

.hack

//omake gallery



どっと吐く@コミック版
DEEP SIGH @ COMIX

ELK
Both the game and the comic Hack are extremely hot right now especially the Tsukasa and Hotaru characters!
I've received lots of requests to have them appear in the comic as well.
"Sigh" cartoon main character
TSUKASA
HOTARU
BUT...
GAME CHARACTER
IF HOTARU LOOKED MORE LIKE ELK...
HOW-EVER
THE TRUTH IS, HOTARU IS THE SAME TYPE OF CHARACTER
BETCHA DIDN'T NOTICE! THEY ARE PRETTY DIFFERENT
if
if
ELK (Tsukasa)
WI-WILL YOU... JOIN MY PARTY?
funny
funny
JUST IMAGINE!!
HOTARU WOULD STILL BE HOTARU ON THE INSIDE!!
EVEN IF HOTARU LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE ELK.
HANG IN THERE, HOTARU! DON'T GIVE UP, HOTARU!
OH!!
THIS JUST MIGHT BE—
No—!!
OH!!
Aye aye aaaay-ee!

This has been such a joy to work on, having so many more people supporting me than during my work on the first volume. Plus having this mode into a cartoon! I'm so glad I've had the chance to come into contact with such a great work as .hack, such great people to work with, and such great readers and fans. It makes me glad I've come this far in my career.

I hope you stick with me till the end!
See you again in Volume 3!

Rei Izumi

Volume 2 Staff
Shinji Mamoru
Naoko Toda
Yuki Tsuchiya
[illegible]
Michiko Miyuki
Tetsuo
Yuko Kodama
[illegible]

Thank you very much!
I'm sooo looking forward to Hiroshi's art at 02 in Hanamaru! I love you!
Thank you everyone who wrote us comments for the volume!
Tomosaki: you're always there for me
I love you!!

2

VOLUME 2!! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!

MAKO MABUNI UTSUKI ITOU ICHIRO YUKOTO DAI MASUHITA

THANKS FOR GIVING ME COURAGE.

(WHEN MEDIAS COLLIDE)

Super-hot game version, hack Volume 2 Cyber Connect 2
(Piroshi Matsuyama)

Kadokawa Comics A

.hack

ドットハック//たそがれのうでわでんせつ

//黄昏の腕輪伝説

漫画 IZUMI REI 依澄れい

2

原作 HAMAZAKI TATSUYA 浜崎達也